

Chapter 2  
COMING HOME TO WORK INITIATIVE

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## Chapter 2 COMING HOME TO WORK INITIATIVE

### 2.01 Introduction

The Coming Home to Work (CHTW) program was originally launched as a pilot program at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2003 and later expanded by the Office of Human Resources and Administration. The program is a part of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employment initiative. In 2005, the program responsibility was transferred to the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service and is integrated with VR&E's early intervention and outreach efforts to Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) Servicemembers.

### 2.02 References and Resources

Laws:	38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 3120 38 U.S.C. 3102
Regulations:	38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 21.70 38 CFR 21.76
VA Forms (VAF):	VAF 28-1902b, Counseling Record – Narrative Report VAF 28-1902n, Supplemental Sheet for Counseling Record – Narrative Report

### 2.03 CHTW Initiative

#### a. Framework

The CHTW initiative is a primary early motivational and outreach activity by VR&E for an injured Servicemember pending medical separation. The Servicemember may be hospitalized at major military treatment facilities, VA Medical Center facilities or health care facilities across the country.

#### b. Services

The services available under CHTW include all early-intervention services provided by VR&E to an eligible Servicemember pending medical separation and to an eligible Veteran receiving treatment at community-based healthcare organizations or VA Medical Center facilities. An eligible Servicemember with a memorandum rating of a least 20 percent is entitled to an evaluation for VR&E benefits regardless of their anticipated date of discharge.

A severely ill or injured Servicemember may also be entitled to vocational rehabilitation services under the provision of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (NDAA of FY 2008) enacted on January 28, 2008. The provision specifies that, "a member of the Armed Forces with a severe injury or illness is entitled to such benefits (including rehabilitation and vocational benefits, but not including compensation) from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to facilitate the recovery and rehabilitation of such member as the Secretary otherwise provides to Veterans of the Armed Forces receiving medical care in medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs facilities in order to facilitate the recovery and rehabilitation of such members." This provision expires on December 31, 2014.

Although a Servicemember cannot participate in the VR&E program until his/her eligibility for Chapter 31 benefits are established, this early outreach activity is critical in identifying a potential participant as soon as possible. Additionally, Chapter 36 services may be provided to a transitioning Servicemember who is within six months of discharge from active duty or within one year following his/her discharge from active duty. Chapter 36 services include career assessment and vocational counseling.

A Servicemember or Veteran who is found entitled to and in need of VR&E services may enter a program of vocational rehabilitation. The VR&E benefits and services for an eligible Servicemember or Veteran may include tuition, fees, books, supplies, adaptive equipment and employment placement assistance. However, a Servicemember may not receive a monthly subsistence allowance or a Revolving Fund Assistance (RFA) under the VR&E program while on active duty.

Additionally, a Servicemember may not receive a program of independent living (IL) services only (38 U.S.C. 3120 (b) and 38 U.S.C. 3102 (1)(A)(i)). However, a Servicemember who qualifies under NDAA of FY 2008 and is found in need of a program of IL services, a program of solely IL services focusing on the transition from military to civilian life may be provided such services while he/she remains on active duty.

In general, IL services may be provided to a Servicemember who is determined to have a serious employment handicap (SEH) under an extended evaluation or as part of a program of services leading to an employment goal (38 CFR 21.76(4)(ii) and (iii)).

#### c. Staffing

A CHTW Coordinator is assigned to each VR&E regional office. The responsibilities of the CHTW Coordinator are assigned specifically to a

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) who provides early intervention and outreach to an eligible Servicemember or Veteran. Outreach activities include attendance in Job Fairs, Transition Assistance Program (TAP) briefings, Yellow Ribbon events and coordination with Federal Recovery Coordinators (FRC), Warrior Transition Unit (WTU) coordinators and Army Wounded Warrior (AW2) coordinators. These responsibilities may be assigned as primary or auxiliary duties.

#### 2.04 Expansion of CHTW Through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) enhances services to a severely ill or injured Servicemember who is being discharged from active military service through the IDES. See Appendix K, MOUs for a copy of the MOU.

##### a. VR&E IDES Counselor

An IDES counselor is a VRC who is permanently assigned to a military installation to provide VR&E services to a Servicemember transitioning through IDES or referred by DoD's Education and Employment Initiative (E2I) program.

##### b. Roles and Responsibilities of the IDES Counselor

The IDES counselor must ensure that appropriate forms for release of information are complete. In addition, the counselor conducts a vocational evaluation with the Servicemember and provides a copy of the assessment results and recommendations to the Servicemember's Recovery Case Coordinator or Chain of Command. The counselor records the date of the assessment in the Veterans Tracking Information (VTA). Should the Servicemember decline a Chapter 31 evaluation, the counselor adds a note in the VR&E portion of the VTA. See Appendix AJ for additional information on VTAs.

##### c. Scheduling for Evaluation

A Servicemember must be scheduled for a face-to-face initial appointment upon receipt of a referral from IDES, E2I staff or other designated DoD sources. The face-to-face meeting must be held at a convenient location on a military installation.

A Servicemember must be referred to a CHTW Coordinator at the nearest VR&E office when there is no assigned IDES counselor in a military

installation. If the Servicemember is unable to report to a VR&E office, the meeting should be scheduled in an alternate convenient location.

The VA/DoD MOU instructs military commanders to make the initial appointment mandatory for any Servicemember referred to the Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) phase of IDES. The VR&E Officer (VREO) must work with the Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officers (PEBLO) and military commanders to develop a method of reporting and rescheduling a Servicemember who is unable to report to their initial appointment.

d. Documenting the Evaluation

The counselor documents collected information and determinations during the evaluation on VAF 28-1902b. Follow-up evaluations and vocational exploration are documented on VAF 28-1902n (see Appendix O, VA Forms).

e. Tracking Cases

All VRCs assigned as IDES counselors are granted access rights to VTA. VR&E offices without a full-time IDES counselor have a designated staff member(s) with access to VTA.

VTA is a web-based portal used in tracking and reporting activities for a Servicemember referred to IDES. IDES counselors are responsible for updating VR&E-specific fields on established cases in VTA.

Guidelines for requesting access and user's instructions for VTA are provided in Appendix AJ, Instructions for Registering and Accessing VTA.

## 2.05 Transitioning to VR&E Services

A Servicemember who is entitled to vocational rehabilitation services may be reassigned to a different VRC for case management. VREOs must ensure that the case transfers from the IDES counselors are conducted with a warm handoff. The IDES counselor must contact the receiving VRC via telephone or email prior to the transfer of a Servicemember's case. Follow-up contacts will be made to ensure that the Servicemember meets with a VRC within 30 days of transfer. These contacts must be clearly documented in the CWINRS Notes.

If the Servicemember relocates and his/her case is transferred to another Regional Office's (RO) jurisdiction, the IDES counselor must coordinate with the VREO of the receiving RO to ensure that the Servicemember meets with a VRC within 30 days of transfer.